

**CLAIMS**

What is claimed is:

- 5        1. A monitoring system for remotely monitoring an item or activity, said monitoring system comprising:  
                recording means for recording a visual record of an item or activity;  
                automatic sorting means for automatically sorting the visual records;  
                communicating means in communication with said recording means, said  
10      communicating means is used for communicating the visual record; and  
                security means operatively connected to said communicating means,  
wherein said security means is used for controlling access to the monitoring system.
- 15      2. The monitoring system according to claim 1, wherein said communicating means is selected from the group consisting essentially of fax lines, phone lines, modem, TI line, Internet, DSL, cable modem, dial-up Internet, wide area network, Intranet, local area network, ISDN, wireless connections, satellite communications, direct cable connection, radio communication, and audio communication.
- 20      3. The monitoring system according to claim 1, wherein said security means is selected from the group consisting essentially of an access code, a PIN number, and password.
- 25      4. The monitoring system according to claim 1, wherein said recording means is selected from the group consisting essentially of a digital camera and standard cameras.

5. A method of remotely monitoring an item or activity, said method comprising the steps of:

recording a digital image of the item or activity;

5 automatically sorting the visual records;

communicating the digital image of the item through a communication system; and

accessing the digital image using a secured access device.

10 6. The method according to claim 5, wherein said recording step includes scanning a photograph into a computer thereby creating a digital image.

7. The method according to claim 5, wherein said recording step includes utilizing a digital camera to digitally record the image of the item.

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8. The method according to claim 7, wherein said recording step further includes digitally photographing the item.

9. The method according to claim 7, wherein said recording step further includes  
20 digitally videotaping the item.

10. The method according to claim 5, wherein said accessing step includes accessing the digital image using a passcode.

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11. The method according to claim 5, wherein said recording step includes recording the image of status of an item then recording the image of the identifier and then recording the image of the activity or item.

30 12. The method according to claim 5, further including the step of surveying a user of the system with regard to the activity or item.